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DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG  
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON  
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU  
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

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SUBJECT: DARFUR REBEL UPDATE

REF: A) KHARTOUM 1434  
B) ASMARA 592  
C) KHARTOUM 567

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Darfur's rebels remain fundamentally divided according to what their leaders told poloff during a December 14-18 visit to Ndjamena, Chad. The rebel leaders claim that JEM, while rich in vehicles and equipment, lacks fighters and the popular support of the people of Darfur. Almost all contacts stated that SLA/Unity presents a formidable military force, but suffers from internal political division. Rebel leaders also discussed the quickly-changing loyalties and defections between the movements, the relationship between JEM and the Government of Chad, the lagging peace process, and the visit of Abdul Wahid's field commanders to Paris. JEM's Foreign Secretary asserted that JEM would soon tackle by itself the problems of car jacking and banditry in Darfur. Overall, rebel leaders appear to focus more energy and attention on undermining rival movements and leaders (particularly the Justice and Equality Movement) than preparing for negotiations, working towards unity, or presenting their grievances against the Government of Sudan. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) From December 14-18, TDY poloff met the following Darfur rebel movements, civil society leaders, and political representatives in Ndjamena, Chad:

REBEL MOVEMENTS:

- Justice and Equality Movement: Foreign Secretary Bushara Suliman Nour
- SLA/Unity: Zubier Mukhtar Salim, Musa Ahmat Omar, Abdallah Yehia (conversation via satellite phone)
- SLA/Field Command: Adam Ali Shogar
- Revolutionary Democratic Forces Front: Omar Hassan Mohammed, Salah Mohammed Abdrahman (a.k.a. Abu Surra) (phone conversation)
- JEM/Collective Leadership - Omar Bakhit Abaker

OTHERS:

- "The Neutral and Independent Committee:" Kamal Eldin Ibrahim
- Umma Party Representative: Toufiq Ali
- Ahlem Friga-Noy, Political Officer, French Embassy, Ndjamena

REBELS' ASSESSMENT OF JEM

13. (SBU) Almost all contacts said JEM's military strength is exaggerated. (Comment: We recognize the biased and self-interested opinions of these non-JEM rebel leaders. End Comment.) JEM does have the most vehicles and sophisticated equipment, thanks to the Government of Chad, but it lacks the troops necessary to operate such equipment, stated these sources. Omar Bakhit, a former JEM member until 2007 (and now a deputy to Bahr Abu Gharda in the JEM/Collective Leadership) told poloff that Khalil Ibrahim's JEM has just over 50 vehicles, 350 soldiers, "and more money than it knows what to do with." Due to this lack of troops, Bakhit added JEM

focuses its recruitment efforts in the internally- displaced persons camps in eastern Chad. Other contacts, such as SLA/Unity's Salim, said that the majority of JEM's fighters are actually Chadians, many of whom are formally affiliated with the GoC's security and military. (NOTE: Rumors continue to circulate about an impending JEM attack on the Sudanese capital or elsewhere in the country. Sudanese Armed Forces conducted air and land exercises throughout Khartoum during the weekend of December 19-20. One member of the AU/UN's Joint Mediation Support Team also reported that GOS officials told Joint Special Representative Adada that JEM had allegedly crossed the border with 300 vehicles. END NOTE.)

14. (SBU) Ibrahim, a self-described "unaffiliated Darfuri exile trying to unite the rebels," said that JEM is second to SLA/Unity in terms of military strength. JEM has the next highest number of vehicles, though it is weak in terms of soldiers and popular support. When discussing JEM's apparent strength, SLA/Unity contacts such as Zubier Salim, reiterated that relative strength among the Darfuri rebels can quickly change. For example, according to Salim, in 2003 JEM had only 3 cars while Unity had more than 60. SLA/Field Command's Adam Ali Shogar separately agreed stating, "rather than view rebel movements in terms of their current strength, you need to evaluate the rebel movements by their presence in Darfur, their popular support, and their dependence on others." (Note: Shogar is one of the most experienced rebels. In 1992, he and several other leaders tried to launch an anti-NIF rebel group from Chadian territory. End Note)

16. (SBU) Almost all contacts criticized what they termed JEM's hidden Islamic agenda, its alleged relationship with Popular Congress Party (PCP) leader Hassan Al-Turabi, and JEM leaders' former close relationship with the Sudanese Government. JEM/CL's

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Bakhit asserted that several PCP leaders (Ibrahim Al-Maz and Sadig Maro) left their positions in the PCP and joined JEM following the May 10 attack. SLA/Unity representatives also separately claimed that JEM has a \*secret\* Islamic agenda, with Musa Ahmet Omar saying, "Khalil Ibrahim will be worse than Bashir - you just wait and see."

#### CONSENSUS ON SLM/UNITY'S MILITARY STRENGTH

17. (SBU) All rebel leaders, including JEM's Foreign Secretary, acknowledged SLM/Unity's military strength. JEM's Foreign Secretary noted, "Unity is a real military power, if they are not divided politically." Darfur activist Ibrahim believes that SLM/Unity is the strongest rebel movement with between 1,000-3,000 men and over 100 vehicles. SLM/Unity representatives stated that they have positions all over Darfur, but their largest camps are in Shegag Karo, Furawiya, Muahjarriaya, and East Jebel Marra. Other representatives stated that Unity, which formerly had a presence only in North Darfur, is starting to move to the South (towards Jebel Marra and Tabit) and to the East towards Yassine, Haskanita, and Muhjarriya. SLM/Unity's Salim said that his movement has approximately 65 vehicles. Forty of these "technicals" are constantly moving to different SLA/Unity locations. The others are based permanently around SLA/Unity locations in Furawiya, Shegag Karo, Birmaza, and Helif. Abaker Kado remains the General Commander of SLA/Unity, stated Salim.

18. (SBU) All contacts, including Unity representatives, also acknowledged political difficulties within SLA/Unity. Unity's Salim said that this division is often exaggerated, but then added there is a power struggle between Suliman Jamous and Abdallah Yehia. Salim described particular SLM/Unity commanders as being in "Jamous's camp" or "Yehia's camp." According to Salim, Suliman Jamous "changed" during his stay in the Kadugli hospital, and that after all of the publicity received, he became more concerned about taking on a leadership role in the movement. All Unity contacts noted that SLA/Unity hopes to hold a party conference early in 2008. The preparatory council for this conference has already been established, according to these sources. The last time that SLA/Unity had a large party conference was in January 2008. He expected that the next conference will be held near Birmaza, in North Darfur.

¶9. (SBU) SLM/Unity representatives, including Abdallah Yehia, downplayed their relationship with Minni Minnawi and strongly criticized him and SLM/MM as a whole. Darfur Activist Ibrahim also separately agreed that Minnawi and SLA/Unity are not as close as some people think. (Comment: This came as a surprise given Minnawi's repeated claims as well as numerous reports of close coordination and good relations with SLM/Unity. End Comment.) Salim dismissed Minnawi as an irrelevant player in Darfur. He said that Unity's commanders have distanced themselves from Minnawi since they asked for his permission to stage a coordinated attack on Darfur. Salim said that these Unity commanders hoped to stage an attack on Darfur's cities by posing as SLM/MM ("as they can move freely wherever they want,") but that Minnawi refused this proposal. Salim said he is more interested in improving coordination with SLM/Field Command's Adam Ali Shogar and SLM/AW's Suliman Marjan than working with Minnawi.

#### REBELS' RELATIONSHIP WITH CHAD

¶10. (SBU) All rebels (including JEM) told poloff that Chad's support to JEM remains strong, though representatives from the diplomatic community resident in Ndjamena cautioned that Deby may be stepping away from JEM. SLA/Unity representative Omar said that JEM continues to receive direct support from Chad. Many other rebels all separately claimed that Khalil Ibrahim maintains a base and is located in Njaras (phonetic), Eastern Chad, most of the time. JEM's Foreign Secretary Bushara Suliman claimed the GoC's support for JEM remains strong, as the GoC feels indebted to JEM for coming to its aid during Chadian rebel attacks.

¶11. (SBU) French Political Officer Friga-Noy based in Ndjamena believes that President Deby is intentionally backing away from JEM as "we have entered a new period in JEM-GoC relations." According to Friga-Noy, the Chadian Government allows rebels to operate throughout Chad ("as many Zaghawa rebels crossed the border seeking refuge with their Chadian brethren,") but that its direct support, especially for JEM, has dramatically decreased over the last few months. As evidence, Friga-Noy asserted that the number of JEM representatives in Ndjamena has significantly decreased, and that the appointment of former JEM point-person Dausa Deby, the President's brother, as Ambassador of Libya signals a change in the GoC's attitude to JEM. Friga-Noy dismissed JEM's claims of ongoing

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support from the GoC saying, "When JEM is in danger their representatives often talk about how great their relationship is with the GoC." (Note: On this point, SLA Unity's Omar claimed that Dausa Deby's appointment as Ambassador of Libya will not dramatically affect JEM's relationship with the GoC, because other officials such as the Sultan of Timane, Abd Al Rahim Bahr, are more involved in coordination with JEM. Umma Party Representative and civil society leader Toufig Ali also said that the government of Chad is engaging in "political theater." According to him, Chad has not significantly reduced its support of the rebel movements, but is only being more discrete and quiet about its relationship with the rebel movements. End Note)

¶12. (SBU) SLA/Unity's Salim said that the GoC's support for JEM comes not only in military hardware, but also in recruitment for the movement. In his view, President Deby has tried to bring other rebels into the fold by offering money to prominent SLA/Unity leader Suliman Jamous to join JEM - an offer Jamous rejected. As for Unity's own relationship with Chad, Ibrahim said it was "weak." URF's Bakhit was more direct, saying, "If Chad ends its support to JEM, Khalil Ibrahim is done."

#### PEACE PROCESS

¶13. (SBU) JEM continues to engage with the peace process, while SLA/Unity and the other smaller movements voiced skepticism and pessimism about the Chief Mediator, Qatari involvement, and the overall process. JEM's Foreign Secretary stated that JEM is working closely with Bassole. In their most recent meetings with Bassole on December 16, JEM urged the latter to talk to Chad and focus on Chad-Sudan relations. According to Suliman, Deby is still

suspicious about Bassole, and believes he may have been co-opted by the Sudanese Government. Suliman also said that JEM is working with other rebel movements on drafting a "framework agreement between the rebel movements prior to negotiations." (Note: SLA/Unity said that discussions had not significantly progressed with JEM on this document. URF Representative said that they had not been consulted by JEM about this platform. End Note.) Suliman also confidently asserted that in order for negotiations to succeed, only three rebel movements are needed at the table: JEM, Abdul Wahid Al-Nur, and Unity.

¶14. (SBU) SLA/Unity's leader Abdallah Yehia told poloff via satellite phone that press reports from December 16, announcing that SLA/Unity had rejected peace negotiations in Qatar, were incorrect. Yehia admitted that he was skeptical about the Qatari involvement, and that Unity had not been in direct communication with the Qataris and therefore could not make a decision on their involvement. Yehia said that he assigned Unity's Sharif Harir (currently in Asmara, reftel b) to lead the negotiations for his movement. Yehia said that Unity demands that any negotiations must be separate from discussions on postponing an ICC indictment, and that Unity believes only "getting rid of this Islamic regime will bring peace to Darfur."

¶15. (SBU) Despite being in semi-regular contact with the JMST (namely Boubou Niang,) Yehia said that the relationship between the Chief Mediator and the Qataris was unclear. Yehia stated that it is regrettable that Bassole has not been able to meet him in the field. Unity's Salim was more direct, saying that SLA/Unity has not been adequately included in the peace process. According to this representative, Chief Mediator Bassole has only conducted meetings with senior Unity representatives over the phone - something that "is not acceptable for SLA/Unity."

¶16. (SBU) Other rebel leaders from smaller movements such as JEM/Collective Leadership and SLA/Field Command were even more critical of the peace process. "If only JEM and Abdul Wahid sign an agreement, that will never solve the problems of Darfur," said Omar Bakhit. Abu Surra, the leader of one of the largest Arab rebel movements, said that the peace process must include disaffected Arabs, and threatened, "if you want to see a real rebellion, wait and see the Arab reaction if they cut another deal with just the Zaghawa or the Fur."

¶17. (SBU) Darfur activist and Umma party representative Toufiq Ali commented that he believes the Justice and Equality movement is trying to prevent other more legitimate movements from taking the lead in peace negotiations. Ali claimed that JEM is significantly weaker following the Omdurman attack, and therefore ready to cut a deal with the GoS.

#### DEFLECTIONS, SHIFTING LOYALTIES, AND COMPETING CLAIMS

¶18. (SBU) All rebel representatives described frequent defections,

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shifting alliances, and an overall chaotic, fractured, and dynamic rebel landscape. For example, multiple representatives from differing movements claimed the loyalty of prominent field commanders, and debated whether the United Resistance Front actually still exists. Almost all contacts said that both Sudanese newspapers and written statements on rebel websites and dissident bulletin boards cannot be trusted, and often publish misinformation to distort the image of the rebels and create confusion.

¶19. (SBU) All rebels did agree, however, that Adam Bakhit of SLA Field Command did defect from the United Resistance Front (URF) to SLM/Minni Minnawi. Adam Ali Shogar was very critical of his former SLA/Field Command partner, saying that it has been over two years since Adam Bakhit has been in the field. (Note: When a member of URF, Adam Bakhit was its e Chief Commander and Shogar was the General Secretary. End Note.) According to Shogar, Bakhit left with only three cars and a handful of men, while his own forces control the remaining 30 vehicles. JEM/CL's Bakhit says that the URF lives on after Bakhit's departure, as Abdallah Banda has assumed responsibility as URF's chief military commander.



¶20. (SBU) SLA/Unity representatives (including Abdallah Yehia) denied that SLA/Unity commanders Sadiq Baro and Salah Jerbo had defected to JEM (as previously claimed by JEM's Bushara Suliman and as published in a written statement in SudaneseOnline.com.) (Note: Jerbo is widely rumored to be under investigation from the International Criminal Court. End Note.) With respect to Jerbo, Omar stated, "We did not kick him out of the movement, but if the ICC calls for him, we will immediately turn him over to the court." Yehia also denied expelling Osman Bushra from Unity, and said that the press release attributed to him on Sudanese Online was part of the Government's misinformation campaign. SLM/FC's Shogar claimed that Salah Jerbo is actually independent of all movements, and believes that Unity adopts many different autonomous commanders without securing their loyalty or commanding their actions.

¶21. (SBU) All movements except for JEM/CL claimed that the URF had completely disbanded (reftel C). JEM/CL's Bakhit, however, insisted that URF lives on in four groups led by the following individuals: 1) Khamis Abdallah (currently in Nairobi from the Masalit tribe) and his field commander Haidir Gola Koma. 2) Sharif Adam Nasr from the former NMRD. 3) Ibrahim Zubeidi from the Arab dominated URFF 4) Bahr Abu Gharda of JEM Collective Leadership. Bakhit said that Bahr is currently East of Muhajarriya and claimed that URF has a strong presence in Jebel Marra, Gaida, Yassine, Muhajarriya, and Haskaina. Upon hearing Bakhit's claims of URF's strength, Darfur activist and head of the "Neutral Committee" Ibrahim commented, "URF is done. Bahr Abu Gharda is just dreaming that the URF exists and sees it as the only way to prove himself." Shogar separately agreed, and said that he only entered URF on a trial basis. Ibrahim added that Abu Gharda has less than ten cars, and that Abu Gharda now focuses his efforts on "poaching" members of rival movements such as Mansour Irbab, the General Secretary of Khamis Abdallah. Of the former URF members, Ibrahim speculated that Khamis Abdallah is the strongest, while Adam Ali Shogar has a small, though respectable force. (Note: Shogar claimed that he controls the area between Birmaza and Omr Rahik in particular an area called Omraras south of Muzbet. He said that in September, he took six cars from the Government of Sudan, a significant addition to his force. Despite his claims, Shogar admitted that it is difficult to sustain his movement, and added that he is envious of JEM's continued support from the GOC. End Note.)

#### PLEA FOR UNIFICATION

¶22. (SBU) Almost all rebel representatives except for JEM requested assistance from the U.S. in helping unite Darfur's rebel movements. According to Shogar, Khalil Ibrahim, Bahr Abu Gharda, and Jibril Tek need to come to a common understanding and reunite the Justice and Equality Movement, while SLA/Field Command, Unity, Abdul Shafie, Abdul Wahid, Minni Minnawi, and Khamis Abdallah should focus on unification efforts among the former SLA. Unification will require outside help. This is such a big project that "no single leader today will be able to unite the movements by himself." Shogar predicted that there will be no progress in Darfur without unification of the movements. JEM/CL's Bakhit separately requested US support for unification efforts among the rebel movements. He said that although uniting with his former JEM colleagues might be impossible, JEM/CL and URF could easily unite with Abdul Wahid and SLA/Unity.

¶23. (SBU) Kamal Eldin Ibrahim of "The Neutral and Independent Committee" believes that his organization presents the only hope for unification of Darfur's rebels. Started in December 2007, the organization seeks to remain impartial to any group, while working

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for the "unity of the revolutionary movements." (Note: Materials from the "Neutral and Independent Committee" are available from Post on request. End Note.) According to Ibrahim, if the following individuals agree to work towards unification, the rebel movements can become united again and overthrow the Sudanese Government: 1) Khalil Ibrahim (JEM) 2) Bahr Abu Gharda (JEM/Collective Leadership) 3) Sharif Harir (SLA/Unity) 4) Adam Ali Shogar (SLA/Field Command) 5) Suliman Jamous (SLA/Unity) 6) Abdallah Yehia (SLA/Unity) 7) Adam Bakhit (SLM/MM).

¶24. (SBU) Even before unification, Ibrahim believes that military coordination, based on geographic alliances, can lead to rebel unification. He said that his committee has established coordinators for each region of Darfur. The following individuals are in contact with all rebel movements and will coordinate their regional efforts when attacked by the GoS: 1) Suliman Marjan (Helif / Midob) 2) Salah Mohammad (Berti areas) 3) Jar Al-Nabi (Hashaba, North of Kas) 4) Muhammad Terrada (Jebel Marra)

#### ABDUL WAHID'S COMMANDERS TRAVEL TO PARIS

¶25. (SBU) French political officer in Ndjamen, Friga Noy stated that France discretely facilitated the travel of three senior field commanders for Abdul Wahid Al-Nur. Abaker Kenso, Salah Al-Din Tur, and Muhammad Nimr to Paris during the week of December 14. The commanders first traveled to Ndjamen and then were flown to Paris. She said that the field commanders are more interested in participating in negotiations than Abdul Wahid, and that the French see this as a way of putting pressure on him.

#### JEM PLEDGES TO TAKE ON CAR JACKING

¶26. (SBU) According to JEM's Foreign Secretary, Bushara Suliman, JEM will soon start targeting the perpetrators of car jackings and banditry in Darfur. Suliman emphasized that this phenomenon damages the image of the rebels, prevents the delivery of humanitarian aid to the region, and empowers the Government. Suliman accused former JEM military commander, Jibril Tek, as one of the main "criminals" responsible for banditry along the Chad-Sudan border. (Note: Jibril Abdel Karim Bahri 'Tek', a Zaghawa Kabka from Chad, was one of JEM's military leaders until his dismissal in February 2004. After his dismissal he went on to found the NMRD. End Note.) SLA Unity's Omar separately claimed that "as a movement" SLM/Unity has not been involved in car jacking, and that SLM/Unity helped the UN retrieve approximately 40 stolen vehicles.

#### COMMENT

¶27. (SBU) The fragmentation of the rebel groups and animosity among them is troubling. Even though some of the rebel leaders mentioned above are of marginal importance at the moment (e.g. former URF,) they could undermine the peace process. They also could continue to make Darfur a chaotic and violent region, even if there is progress in peace negotiations with the larger groups. Almost all contacts seem to agree that SLA/Unity carries significant military force, while admitting its political problems and personality conflicts among n Jamous, Harir, and Yehia. In our view, SLM/Unity should receive more attention from the Chief Mediator; Bassole would benefit from meeting individually with Jamous, Harir, and Yehia. Perhaps the common theme drawn from all of the meetings was the need for UNAMID to be better informed. The lack of good intelligence on rebel movements, their positions, and their relative strengths makes it possible for rebel leaders to make unsubstantiated and inaccurate claims. To date, UNAMID has not definitively mapped rebel positions, leaving this an open area for debate among the movements.

¶28. (SBU) Former AU/UN mediators Salim and Eliasson spent much of 2007 focusing on unification efforts that ultimately proved unrealistic. Nevertheless, there still exists the possibility of unifying some SLA factions. That said, such unification is a long term project, and one that we would recommend not be a top priority for the Chief Mediator. As long as diverse personalities, vested interests, and ethnic differences dominate Darfur's rebel groups, the latter will remain divided, and Darfur's long-sought-after peace will remain elusive.

¶29. (SBU) The focus of the Chief Mediator, UNAMID, and the international community in early 2009 should be on defining unilateral security commitments that the GOS can take within the framework of a ceasefire monitoring mechanism. According to UNAMID, the majority of offensive military actions in Darfur during 2009 were taken by the GOS, though some in the context of (allegedly) routing out bandits; reducing or eliminating these actions would dramatically reduce the amount of violence in Darfur. Meanwhile the

Chief Mediator, UNAMID, and the international community can continue to urge rebels to sign onto a security framework and more clearly define their political demands. If the GOS commits to unilateral security steps and lives up to them during 2009, cutting off support to rebels from Chad and Libya (and to a lesser extent from Eritrea) while offering a reasonable deal for them to sign onto when ready may be the only realistic approach to winding down the conflict over time.

ASQUINO